

CHERNOBYL

23

BULGARIA WAS UNPREPARED FOR CHERNOBYL; PEOPLE NOT TOLD THE TRUTH
(WITH CN 28, 90)

SOFIA, JANUARY 23 (BTA)--- NO NATIONWIDE, RELIABLE AND FULL RADIOLOGICAL MONITORING WAS ORGANISED IN BULGARIA AFTER THE ACCIDENT AT THE CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR POWER PLANT, ADMITS MR GEORGI VASSILEV, THE COUNTRY'S SENIOR EXPERT IN RADIOLOGICAL SAFETY. IN HIS VIEW, THIS WAS QUITE IMPOSSIBLE WITH THE AVAILABLE FACILITIES AND PERSONNEL. THE BULGARIAN HEALTH SERVICE DOES NOT HAVE A SINGLE GAMMA-RAY ANALYSER OF ITS OWN FOR A QUICK AND ACCURATE MEASUREMENT OF RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION.

THE BTA RECEIVED MR VASSILEV'S OPINION FROM THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS LAST NIGHT. RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN A NUMBER OF PRESS FEATURES TRYING TO LIFT THE VEIL OF SECRECY AND TO GET AT THE TRUTH ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE DISASTER IN BULGARIA. THE EXPERT OBVIOUSLY DIFFERS FROM SOME OF THESE REPORTS, DESCRIBING THEM AS +ABSOLUTELY UNFOUNDED AND UTTERLY INCOMPETENT ALLEGATIONS+ AND AS +SYMPTOMS OF RADIOPHOBIA+. HE ADMITS, HOWEVER, THAT THE TRUTH WAS WITHHELD FROM THE POPULATION OF BULGARIA AND THAT +INSTEAD OF FULL PUBLIC OPENNESS ABOUT THE RADIOLOGICAL SITUATION, THE OFFICIAL AUTHORITIES LIMITED THEMSELVES TO DIRECTIONS AND INSTRUCTIONS CHANNELLED THROUGH THE RADIOACTIVITY CONTROL SYSTEM.+ THE GLOBAL RADIATION LEAK IN EARLY MAY 1986 FOUND THE COUNTRY UNPREPARED FOR A DISASTER OF THIS KIND AND SCOPE, SAYS BULGARIA'S SENIOR RADIOLOGICAL SAFETY EXPERT.

HE TELLS IN DETAIL ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION OF RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION MONITORING AND ABOUT THE PRECAUTIONS TAKEN WITH RESPECT TO THE POPULATION. THE BACKGROUND GAMMA RADIATION AND THE RADIATION LEVELS OF AIR AND DRINKING WATER WERE MEASURED ON A REGULAR BASIS, AND FOOD WAS CHECKED, TOO. PREVENTIVE IODINE MEDICATION WAS NOT NECESSARY IN BULGARIA.

MR GEORGI VASSILEV CITES DATA ACCORDING TO WHICH THE AVERAGE RADIATION EXPOSURE OF THE BULGARIAN POPULATION IN THE FIRST YEAR FOLLOWING THE DISASTER WAS ONE FIFTH OF THE LEVEL RULED AS PERMISSIBLE BY THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY, THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, THE UNITED NATIONS AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. THE INTEGRAL RADIATION DOSE RECEIVED IN THE LIFETIME OF A GENERATION, I.E. IN APPROXIMATELY 50 YEARS, WILL BE BELOW THE MAXIMUM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS. THIS ESTIMATE OVERLAPS WITH THE UN FORECASTS ABOUT BULGARIA, MR VASSILEV CLAIMS. AN ANALYSIS OF THE BULGARIAN POPULATION REPRODUCTION DOES NOT REVEAL ANY APPRECIABLE DIFFERENCES IN THE PERIODS UP TO 1988. THE INCIDENCE OF MALIGNANT GROWTHS IN THE 1981-1988 PERIOD IS ALSO UNCHANGED WITH RESPECT TO FREQUENCY OF OCCURENCY BEFORE AND AFTER THE CHERNOBYL ACCIDENT, BUT EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDIES HAVE YET TO BE CONDUCTED ACCORDING TO SPECIAL NATIONAL PROGRAMMES.

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INDICATING THAT RADIATION LEVELS COULD INDEED BE VERY HIGH IN BULGARIA, THE EXPERT RECALLS THAT A SUFFICIENTLY EFFECTIVE RADIOLOGICAL PROTECTION CANNOT BE SECURED IN THIS COUNTRY NOW. IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND THAT DRAMATIC PROBLEMS CONCERNING NUCLEAR POWER GENERATION ARE AT ISSUE, TOO, HE EMPHASIZES.

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS HAS ALSO MADE AVAILABLE A MEMO OF THE COMMITTEE FOR THE PEACEFUL USES OF ATOMIC ENERGY ON THE MEDICALLY ACCEPTABLE RADIOACTIVE CONTAMINATION LEVELS INTRODUCED FOR FOOD PRODUCTS IN THIS COUNTRY AFTER THE CHERNOBYL DISASTER AND A LIST OF THE STANDARDS ADOPTED IN THE COMMON MARKET COUNTRIES AND THE US.

(BTA IN ENGLISH/JAN. 23/90) gf

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